s
of

Office of the
Assistant
Secretary of
Administration

USDA Management Report for 1987

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Last year's Management Plan set forth USDA's process for implementing the Administration's management agenda, including such areas as productivity, excess real property, cash and credit management, and financial systems. Through the cumulative efforts of agency policymakers, the USDA Management Council, and other support personnel, many of our goals for improving management in USDA were met. The following highlights are just a few of these accomplishments:

- Payments were scheduled for disbursement no earlier than their due date, resulting in interest savings of $6.3 million.

- Agencies implemented electronic fund transfer systems for collections and disbursements, resulting in interest cost savings of $14.7 million.

- The Federal deficit was reduced by selling loan portfolios, realizing $2.8 billion.

- USDA assumed additional responsibility for management of 97 real property leases from GSA.

- Field tested modules of instruction for 15 generic training areas were fully implemented.

- The National Program Center was established, with expected USDA savings of about $30 million over a 5-year period.

The articles set forth in this year's Management Report discuss not only the accomplishments of Departmental Administration but management improvement accomplishments made by the various USDA agencies. They are significant!

The Department's efforts under the USDA 1988-89 Management Plan will focus on Governmentwide goals and strategies related to credit management, financial management, productivity improvement, improved services through technology, procurement reform, and general management of Government operations.

JOHN J. FRANKE, JR.
Assistant Secretary
for Administration

Financial Management

Thrift Savings Plan

Chosen in October 1986 to develop a recordkeeping system for the Thrift Savings Plan of the new Federal Employees' Retirement System, the Office of Finance and Management's National Finance Center (NFC) had the basic system up and running by the April 1987 deadline. This included the process for updating accounts and posting earnings. Subsequently, routines were developed to produce participant statements, handle forfeitures, and process withdrawals. By yearend, the NFC was maintaining over 1 million accounts valued at more than $1 billion for employees Governmentwide.

The success of the effort brought public recognition to USDA. Testifying before Congress,the Executive Director of the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board, Francis X. Cavanaugh, said, "I must also credit the major contributions of the Department of Agriculture and its National Finance Center in New Orleans...The recordkeeping function is obviously the most challenging and time-consuming task facing the Thrift Investment Board. If the recordkeeping system does not work, all else is in vain. In my entire experience, I have never known a more dedicated, professional, and competent group than the personnel of the National Finance Center. Their obvious enthusiasm and professionalism have been contagious as they deal day-to-day with the hundreds of Federal payroll and personnel offices who must implement the Thrift Savings Plan."

Cash Management Saves $26 Million

USDA continues to focus attention on cash management and payment processes. In fiscal year 1987, cash management savings totalled $26.1 million. The savings came from using concentration banking systems, electronic funds transfer mechanisms, warehousing of payments, lockbox mechanisms, improvements in travel payment, collection of credit report fees, and Direct Deposit/Electronic Funds Transfer (DD/EFT).

Recent initiatives in the area of cash management include:

(1) expanding the use of Treasury General Account to collect receipts;
(2) pilot testing of third party drafts and credit cards for small vendor and miscellaneous payments;
(3) expanding the use of Treasury Assistant Disbursement Authority to make certain emergency payments;
(4) consolidating USDA headquarters imprest funds;
(5) expanding the use of lockboxes; and
(6) using DD/EFT to make travel and allotment payments.

Grants Information System

A contract to redesign and improve the existing Research and Extension Grants Information System (REGIS) was awarded by the Extension Service and the Cooperative State Research Service to World Computer Systems Services Associates, Inc., in fiscal year 1987. Under this contract, the existing REGIS will be upgraded to provide new hardware and systems software. The new system will consist of a super-micro configuration operating in a fourth generation language and an INFORMIX data base management system. Under this configuration, REGIS will provide for multiuser access and allow for more flexibility in data manipulation and report generation than under the existing system.

Significant improvements were also made to the existing REGIS by the staff of the Cooperative Funds Division (CFD) as an interim measure during the redesign of the new system. The existing system software in REGIS was upgraded to allow for easier accessibility and the generation of current status reports. With the current status reports, CFD staff can determine the current grant obligations and disbursements and whether a final financial report is due on a grant. As a result of these improvements, less time is spent on data input and more time on data review and analysis.

In cooperation with these efforts, the CFD staff has also converted all grants formerly paid by Treasury check to the Letter of Credit-Treasury Financial Communication System. This effort has cut the paperwork substantially in processing individual payments. Specific General Cooperative Agreements and Discretionary Grants have also been converted to Letters of Credit. This reduces the document flow among offices within the Agency, makes funds available to recipients as needed, and eliminates delays in requests for reimbursement.

Credit Management and Debt Collection

USDA continues to have a strong and aggressive credit management and debt collection program. We are working closely with the Department of Justice to develop options and alternatives to eliminate the backlog of approximately $5.6 billion in cases referred to the Department of Justice for litigation. In 1987, about 13,000 delinquent accounts were referred to the Internal Revenue Service for offset against tax refunds, of which approximately 6,400 were offset for over $3.5 million. By selling about $4.3 billion of the Farmers Home Administration loan portfolios, the Federal deficit was reduced by about $2.8 billion. Additionally, administrative offsets by the Farmers Home Administration against the Commodity Credit Corporation entitlement payments resulted in collections of about $1.8 million.

Lockbox Deposit Accounting System

The Forest Service (FS) has designed a lockbox deposit accounting system to replace local handling of payments. Purchasers of National Forest timber and other products and services mail their payments directly to a designated lockbox address. The lockbox bank processes the payments and establishes a computer file of the day's business. FS Regional Offices retrieve collection accounting data from the lockbox bank via telecommunications for processing the FS computer system. Electronic mail messages are automatically sent to the applicable National Forest Offices, which then retrieve their data from the Regional Offices, process the information, and transmit it electronically to the USDA Computer Center at Fort Collins, Colorado. The Computer Center stores the data for use in updating the Timber Sale Accounting System, periodically batches the data for all regions, and transmits it electronically to the National Finance Center (NFC) in New Orleans, Louisiana. At NFC the data is entered into the Central Accounting System, which produces internal and external accounting and management reports. Automated reconciliations are performed at FS Regional Offices and at NFC.

Implementation is expected to be completed by June 30, 1988. The lockbox

process is expected to save about $1 million a year in interest to the U.S. Treasury, and over 20,000 work-hours a year in handling deposits and key-entering accounting data.

Disbursing Officer System

During fiscal year 1987, the Forest Service developed and placed into operation a Class A Assistant Disbursing Officer (ADO) system involving payments to vendors during forest fire emergency situations. Under recently received authority from the Treasury Department, the Forest Service ADOs may now issue checks directly to vendors who sell supplies and services necessary for fire suppression functions. Due to the severe fire season, disbursements of approximately $30 million were made during fiscal year 1987.

Benefits of the system include improved vendor-Forest Service relationships, better stock availability due to faster restocking capabilities by vendors, and a more effective payment process during extremely heavy workload periods. The Forest Service has received favorable publicity on this new system.

Automation of Voucher Examinations

The Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) has automated its voucher examination procedure for payment of cooperator vouchers and miscellaneous billings. The purpose of automating the voucher examination process was to ensure payments do not exceed the authorized budgets and established obligations; to ensure timely payment to cooperators and vendors; and to decrease the hours expended in the clerical aspects of examining documents, such as typing schedules and posting payment data to manual records.

The new system automatically ensures that proposed payments do not exceed unliquidated obligations and then records the item as a disbursement-in-transit. The payment-in-transit is recorded as an actual payment when FAS receives notification of payment from the National Finance Center (NFC) through the weekly transaction reports. It permits up-to-date inquiry on all transaction data, account and document balances, greater tracking of all vouchers, and quicker responses to inquiries from cooperators. FAS plans to retain an on-line history file of paid vouchers for the previous 18 months. Vouchers are transmitted to NFC electronically several times per week. This enables vendors to receive their payments several days earlier than with the manual system. Front-end editing by FAS, using the same edit criteria used by NFC, has virtually eliminated all inquiries from NFC for error conditions.

Enhanced Financial Systems

The Office of Finance and Management's National Finance Center (NFC) substantially improved the availability of financial information during 1987. The Central Accounting Data Base Inquiry System was enhanced by development of weekly updates and a transaction data base for all agencies. The system was also expanded to include the Rural Electrification Administration, the Extension Service, the Foreign Agricultural Service, the Agricultural Marketing Service, the Agricultural Research Service, the Office of the Inspector General, the Office of Finance and Management, the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation, the Packers and Stockyards Administration, and the Agricultural Cooperative Service. For the Forest Service, the Center implemented the National Information Reporting Project.

The Payroll/Personnel System was modified to accomodate the new Federal Employee's Retirement System and the Thrift Savings Plan. Improvements were made in the remote printing of forms and the mailing of cash awards. A new Performance Management and Recognition System was implemented, and the reduction-in-force retention registers were automated.

In the area of administrative payments, NFC began processing Farmers Home Administration's contracts through the Purchase Order System, eliminating many forms and providing for better management control of the program. The Center also implemented electronic fund transfers for travel payments.

Reduction of Cost Overruns

Cost fluctuations on design and construction projects can have a serious impact on the successful accomplishment of facility projects and the research programs involved. In 1987, the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) instituted several management control mechanisms to help minimize such cost overruns. A prototype 50 Percent Design Review Board procedure was implemented to correct the problem of design overbudget. Preliminary results of the process were: 12 projects generated a $680,000 surplus, while 3 projects generated a $556,000 deficit. These results were mixed but exposed additional concrete ways to fix the problem. Increased engineering management oversight will help correct this situation in the future.

More importantly, ARS was successful in closing out four major projects at Corvallis, Oregon; Lane, Oklahoma; Booneville, Arkansas; and Oxford, Mississippi, without any cost overruns. Through implementation of these management improvements, cost overruns in ARS were significantly minimized in 1987.

Travelers' Charge Card Program

USDA continues to have the largest civilian Diners Club program in the Federal Government. Although the Department of the Army has overtaken us in the number of cards issued, it has taken them 4 years to do what USDA accomplished in 18 months. Approximately 42,000 USDA travelers currently use Diners Club cards when they travel.

Charges to the card have reached $5 million per month. This has enabled the Department to cut travel advances substantially, thereby saving the Treasury hundreds of thousands of dollars in interest charges.

Cross-Servicing

The Office of Finance and Management's Cross-Servicing Program has made cost-effective USDA financial systems, designed and operated at its National Finance Center, available to other organizations for the mutual benefit of all users. By the end of 1987, the program included five Departments and 11 independent agencies.

In 1987, USDA agencies saved about $1.5 million by sharing fixed and other costs with external users. Projected 1988 savings will increase to about $2.4 million. External users also realize major savings through systems development cost avoidance and lower processing costs. Other benefits to USDA include an increase in systems and service improvements, wider support for acceleratd modernization, more sources of new ways to do things, and greater attention to quality.

Mail Management

In January 1987, the Department converted the Headquarters complex to a metered mail system of postal accountability, and entered into an agreement with a local firm for presorting of first-class letter mail. This resulted in the real-time identification of all postage, elimination of penalty mail surveys, and an annual postal cost reduction of $150,000. Additionally, this action created an awareness among users that penalty mail is not free. The Office of Operations (OO) developed a mail management training program which has been presented to 450 secretaries and other employees that prepare mail in 15 agencies and staff offices. This training included cost-saving tips on mail preparation, plus proper methods for expediting mail delivery and reducing postal costs.

The mail management cost initiative has been further strengthened by taking advantage of postal discounts available with direct accountability mail. This should result in additional annual savings of $150,000. OO now provides a monthly report of actual mail costs to each agency and staff office served. For the first time, offices have a valid tool to establish realistic budget estimates for mail costs. In addition, it provides a documented tracking system to effectively manage mail budgets on a continuing basis.

Timber Sale Accounting Program

The General Accounting Office (GAO) and the Forest Service (FS) have jointly developed a Timber Sale Program Information Reporting System (TSPIRS) in response to direction from the Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies, House Appropriations Committee. The TSPIRS produces three reports.

The first report matches costs against revenues received from the timber harvested areas in the reporting year. Multiyear costs are collected in two pools, one for sale operations costs and one for sale investment costs. In addition, this cost accounting process tracks revenues and costs by three designated timber sale purpose categories. The final product of the first report is an annual financial report showing the gain or loss from the timber activity, similar to the financial reports used in private enterprise. The FS and the Congress will use this report to obtain a reasonably accurate and useful measure of the revenues and costs associated with the timber sale program.

The second report from TSPIRS captures induced values, costs, and benefits that occur over time as a consequence of a forest's annual timber sale program. The third report shows the employment and local community income impacts associated with the timber sale program.

The three reports, when combined, will provide a more complete picture of the benefits of the FS timber sale program. Some uses of the information will include evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of timber sale activities, determining whether programs are meeting Forest Plan objectives, and identifying when forest timber sales programs may need to be adjusted.

Information Resources Management

Computer Center Consolidation

Last year the decision was made to consolidate the Kansas City and Washington Computer Centers following detailed technical and benefit-cost studies which clearly demonstrated service improvement and cost-savings opportunities. A precedent-setting aspect was a joint venture between the Departments of Agriculture and Navy that provided for the Navy to assume operational control of the Washington Computer Center (WCC) and for the transfer of all WCC employees to the Navy. To permit a phased transition of workload to Kansas City, the Navy will provide cross-servicing of data processing for USDA agencies for approximately 1 year.

This consolidation will produce savings to USDA agencies of approximately $30 million over a 5-year period. The USDA-Navy agreement assured continued Federal employment for about 65 career employees, provided the Navy with a modern and well-equipped computer center, along with a full complement of trained and experienced computer specialists, and assured USDA agencies of a smooth transition to Kansas City.

Local Area Network

The Office of Information Resources Management completed the installation of the Department's Local Area Network (LAN) and provided LAN services to users in fiscal year 1987. The Local Area Network Management Center became operational in December 1986 and provided LAN users with support services such as

Cutting the ribbon: Left to right: Captain John McMillan, Bruce Arnold, Glenn Haney, John Okay, and Sandy Wilson

Valencia Russell and Sharon Solsbak providing LAN services

network interfacing, network cable system maintenance, network management, configuration management, administrative support, and training.

During fiscal year 1987, 16 agencies and staff offices used the Departmental LAN with a total of over 500 users. Approximately 100 of these are users of the "LAN video network" with the remainder obtaining data services. The LAN video network is comprised of six full-color, full-motion video channels. In addition to broadcasting CNN and CSPAN I and II, the network broadcasts training and informational programs. Recently, for example, the program "How to Stay Out of Trouble" was produced and broadcast over the LAN as well as transmitted to non-LAN locations throughout the Federal Government. USDA's LAN has the distinction of being one of the largest systems in the country and continues to offer state-of-the-art telecommunications services for USDA.

Field Office Sharing

The Office of Information Resources Management is helping colocated agencies share access facilities to the Departmental data network. The first project at the Diamond Hill office complex in Denver allowed the replacement of four separate nodes with one communications processor. The recovery period for the startup costs was less than 6 months, with a potential of over $2,000 per month savings or cost avoidance.

A larger project is planned for the Grand Junction, Colorado, area. This will incorporate the Forest Service microwave system in that particular area with the Farmers Home Administration, the Soil Conservation Service, and the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service facilities.

These efforts are the first in what is planned for a wider project which will take advantage of the colocation of many USDA offices.

Interagency Data Center Directors' Conference

The second annual Interagency Data Center Directors Conference, sponsored by the Council of Federal Data Center Directors, was hosted by the National Computer Center at Fort Collins. The theme was "The Federal Computer Center in 1995," and featured speakers of national and international reputation in their respective fields. Conference speakers included Brigadier General Joe Engle, astronaut; Jack Jackson, communicator and motivator; John Cullinane, founder of Cullinet; Tom Wilmott, futurist from the International Data Corporaton; and Peter Bye, a communications and networking specialist from London.

Assistant Secretary John Franke addressed the group early in the conference, providing the "Charge to Federal Data Center Directors: Improving Quality." Glenn Haney, Director, Office of Information Resources Management (OIRM), addressed the group the second day on the subject of "Developing a 20/20 IRM Vision of 1995."

Three discussion tracks (12 sessions in total) were also part of the program, covering telecommunications, operations, and management. Two of the telecommunications track sessions dealt with the subject of "Moving to the OSI Standard" and the other on "Controlling Communications Costs." John Okay, Deputy Director, OIRM, chaired a panel dealing with the subject of "The Federal Computing World in 1995."

Sharing of Resources

The Office of Information Resources Management's National Computer Center (NCC) at Fort Collins has agreed to provide mainframe computer processing services to the Bureau of Census, Department of Commerce. The 1-year agreement became effective October 1, 1987.

The agreement came about because the Bureau of Census presently has a processing overload. The agreement will provide an economical solution to Census' short-term need for additional capacity to process some of its geographical information data.

This type of cross-servicing has a two-fold result: (1) NCC's favorable unit costs are maintained for all its clients; and (2) the total USDA dollar outlay for NCC expenses is reduced. Census, too, reduces its cost outlay. By utilizing NCC's computer resources, Census does not need to acquire the additional resources themselves. Federal Government efficiency is thereby increased through sharing of resources between agencies.

Electronic Dissemination of Information

USDA's Electronic Dissemination of Information (EDI) System continues to

catch the attention of the press, agribusiness groups, and others needing immediate access to time-sensitive and perishable data from the Department. During 1987, almost five million lines of information were retrieved by users of the EDI system. This included information such as opportunities to sell agriculture products abroad, market news reports, commodity program reports, outlook and situation reports, press releases, crop production reports, and world agricultural supply and demand estimates.

The system has been enhanced to include access by way of satellite transmission. This can result in significant cost savings to the clients of USDA information.

The EDI system is the first in the Federal sector to provide all the Department's crucial time-sensitive information to the public through electronic means on an equal basis and from a single source. The EDI system is available to other Federal agencies as well and offers them the opportunity to build on USDA's system in meeting their own information dissemination requirements.

Inventory Management

The Processed Commodities Inventory Management System (PCIMS) is a three-agency computer-based system in which orders for food are collected and prioritized by the Food and Nutrition Service for purchase by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS). Currently, each agency has its own system or systems that result in inefficient data entry and fragmented processing. PCIMS will combine functions of three agencies into one system using the latest in computer technology. The PCIMS system is being implemented in three phases; Phase I (determination of user requirements) and Phase II (systems concept phase) have been completed. AMS is currently in Phase III—the implementation stage. It is anticipated that, during fiscal year 1988, PCIMS (operating at the Kansas City Computer Center) will be operating in support of the 1988–1989 buying year.

Joint Venture

A joint venture between the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) and the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) is saving both agencies many dollars in program support costs. The joint venture involves the use of computer hardware and other related office equipment at locations where this is technically feasible.

SCS Chief Wilson Scaling and FmHA Administrator Vance Clark signed the agreement that established the joint venture. Under the agreement each agency purchases its own workstations, FmHA buys the main computer with business software, and SCS purchases the printers. In addition, each agency provides its own custom software and manages its database. Maintenance costs are being shared on a pro rata basis. SCS also is paying to upgrade existing hardware and program.

The AT&T 3B2/400 computer is at the heart of this system. It enables several employees from both agencies to work on completely different tasks at the same time. By the end of 1987 the joint-use system had been installed in 37 collocated field offices. Agency budgets will determine how quickly other collocated offices will become joint-users.

Champ Contract Signed

The Computer Hardware Acquisition and Modernization Program (CHAMP) of the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) became a reality when the Agency signed a major hardware acquisition contract with SMS Data Products Group of McLean, Virginia, on September 30, 1987. SMS will supply the Wyse PC 80286 LAN for the file server, the Wyse PC 286 for workstation I, the Wyse PC 386 for workstation II, and the IBM 9370 for the superminicomputers.

The Wyse PC 386 processes data more than four times faster than the TeleVideo microcomputers distributed over two years ago. The Wyse PC 386 brings to FNS the latest in microcomputer technology. It is 30 percent faster than the 286 and will be used primarily for analytic purposes. FNS is the first USDA agency to have a contract for purchasing 386 microcomputers. Each 286 will be used primarily for word processing and other similar secretarial and clerical purposes.

CHAMP also brings to FNS the latest in IBM superminicomputers—the 9370. The initial three units have already been purchased for FNS Headquarters and for the Northeast and Southeast Regional Offices. The remaining regions are scheduled to receive superminis during fiscal year 1988.

FNS and SMS have formed a partnership to deliver and install the CHAMP hardware. Beginning in late October, preliminary visits were made to each region

Wilson Scaling and Vance Clark—a smiling joint venture for both Agency Heads

by FNS and SMS representatives. Regional management staff were briefed on what to expect during the next several months, including technical matters regarding installation. FNS regional and headquarters Information Resource Management staffs will work closely with SMS to install the equipment as quickly as possible during the period January through September 1988.

The Computer Hardware Acquisition and Modernization Program (CHAMP) training project contract was awarded to Creative Associates International, Inc., of Washington, D.C. The contractor will not only instruct staff on a wide range of software enhancements, but will also conduct management overview seminars and LANs orientation classes.

ADP Capability Expanded

To keep pace with a growing workload of new clients and services, automated data processing capabilities were substantially expanded at the Office of Finance and Management's National Finance Center (NFC) in 1987. Equipment was installed to expand electronic access and improve system response time for users. A NAS 9080 mainframe computer from the Washington Computer Center was also placed in production.

Installation of an Uninterruptible Power Supply System (UPS) began in May. This system will provide "clean" electrical power to the Center's computer equipment and protect it from surges and abrupt losses of power that can lead to loss of data.

With the same concern for system reliability, NFC contracted with a recovery operations center. In the event of a disabling disaster at NFC, operations would be temporarily moved to the recovery center.

Market News

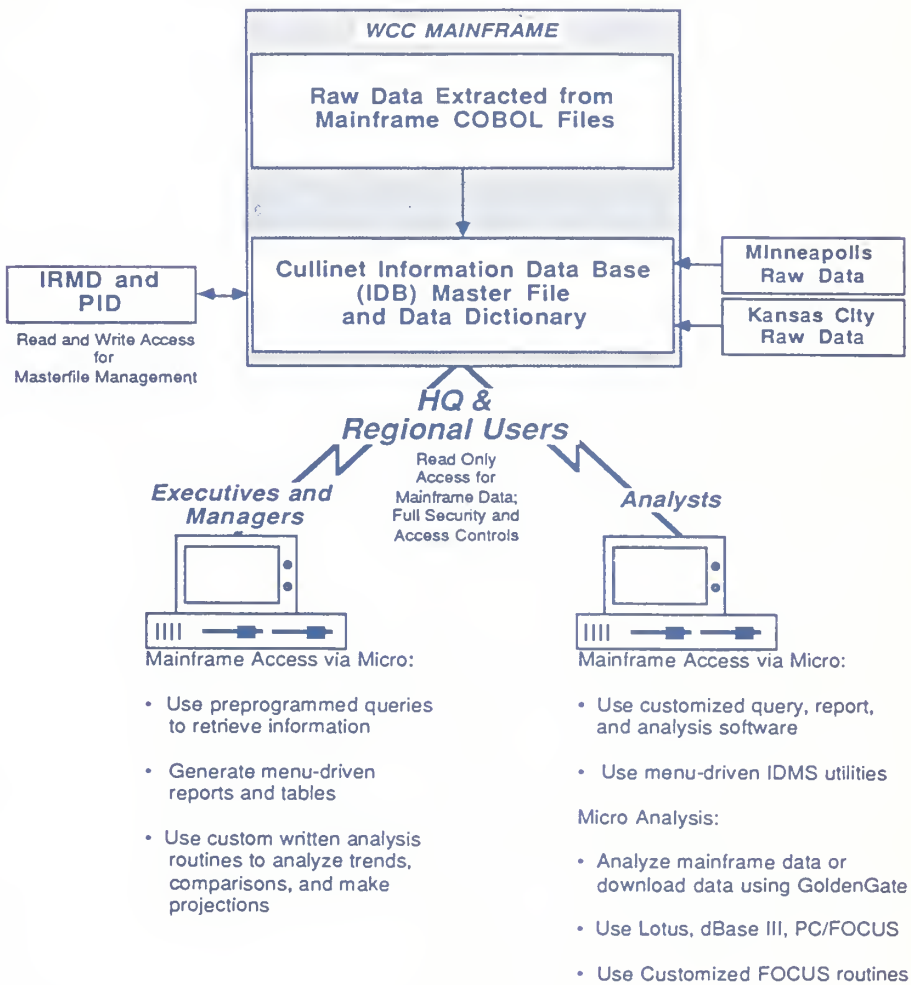
The Market News Telecommunications Network has been upgraded to utilize satellite transmission. The Agricultural Marketing Service is modernizing the network by switching to commercially available microcomputers which will eliminate the dependence on highly specialized terminals. This will enhance the ability of the Market News staff to efficiently service subscribers via both hard copy and electronic media.

National Data Bank

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) needed to improve its capability to assess financial, program, and characteristic data collected by the Agency. Administrative initiatives in the areas of cash management, state administrative cost oversight, and meal reimbursements, as examples, required the availability of accurate and timely information. This requirement led to the current development of the FNS National Data Bank, an automated, centralized information system.

User requirements for consistent and accurate data in the system, along with user friendly software, led to the development of a multitier system which links FNS microcomputers with the Department's mainframe computer. Additionally, the National Data Bank will be linked with FNS' new minicomputers which are scheduled for delivery in early 1988. The use of new fourth generation Cullinet software, with the latest available microcomputer technology, is creating an interactive system which will, for the first time, open up the

Proposed National Data Bank System Architecture: 1986-87



FNS corporate data base, allowing for more timely review of program operations. The first stage of development is nearly completed with "beta" testing currently being performed at selected sites within FNS.

Automation Efforts

The Agricultural Research Service (ARS) has successfully equipped all its Agency Headquarters, Area, and field location administrative and program management units with a standard communicating personal computer and software. These 1,500 personal computers are compatible with ARS and Departmental ADP resources. ARS is working closely with the National Finance Center to increase its use of this valuable information resource.

Distributed Processing

The Forest Service (FS) has reached its FY 1987 goal of supplying field offices with common word processing, data processing and telecommunications capabilities. This effort is 88 percent complete. More emphasis will now be placed on connectivity. Since the National Finance Center (NFC) in New Orleans is a major part of the FS total information environment, an effort was begun to decrease the paper flow and facilitate electronic data entry and retrieval between the NFC and the FS distributed processing system. One of the highest priorities for 1988 is cost-effective telecommunications connectivity with NFC.

FS also procured software to facilitate connectivity between office work stations and their associated host computers and reduced the cost of data moved over the Department telecommunications network. This reduction was made possible through an innovative connectivity strategy that utilizes satellite technology, FS microwave systems, and new methods of communicating with Departmental computer centers through remote batch. The estimated savings generated in 1987 will approach $3 million.

Automated Systems

Two major personal computer based systems were implemented at all the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) locations (over 120) during FY 1987. The Agency's Annual Resources Management Planning process, which incorporates short-range program planning, financial planning, personnel staffing, advance procurement planning, and facilities planning, was automated. The system is menu driven and very user friendly. Data is entered one time, calculations are performed automatically, and the data is loaded into data bases at the Area and Headquarters levels. The second major system is a location-level automated funds control system which provides current balances for the organization's account.

Real Property, Facilities and Procurement Management

Headquarters Facilities

Fiscal year 1987 was a busy year for the Office of Operations' Facilities Management Division (FMD) in their never-ending quest to provide the necessary support service for the USDA building complex. The remodeling of the Jefferson Auditorium, the Executive Dining Room, and the Administration Building Cafeteria was the handiwork of the FMD folks. In 1987, they installed over 800 deadbolt locks, responded to 2,000 emergency calls for lockouts and conducted approximately 25,000 work inspections to ensure comfort, safety, and functional efficiency for USDA employees. Over $1.8 million was spent on minor repairs. A half million feet of surface areas were painted and 5,400 square feet of carpet were installed.

The outside of the USDA complex draws a great deal of favorable comment and it is due to the careful planning and prudent purchases of the Contract Services Section of FMD. In 1987, the slope and hillside of the Lot 11 area was landscaped with Junipers, White Pear trees, Ilex plants and ornamental grasses. Additional Whitehouse Pear trees were planted paralleling Independence Avenue and over 23,000 tulip bulbs were planted throughout the complex grounds.

Ever wonder why some of the potted trees and plants within the building do not shed needles and leaves and still retain that fresh look? They are "mummified" plants. These Weyerhaeuser plants and trees were once alive in a forest or nursery before Weyerhaeuser injected a non-toxic preservative into them and put them into a permanent, yet beautiful "sleep." Although the initial cost is substantially higher, long term savings potential is exciting.

Chris Christensen, Chet Reder, Verle Blankenship, and Dr. Edward Kepling of ARS, testing use of Departmental software on an ARS-compatible personal computer

Real Property System

USDA, in conjunction with the Departments of Interior and Transportation, has been testing the general design of a generic real property management system developed by the General Services Administration (GSA). The system, called FIRM (Foundation Information for Real Property Management), was developed based on a recommendation made by the Cabinet Council on Management Administration to design an automated system which could be used by all Federal Government agencies to manage real estate assets more efficiently. The Office of Operations (OO), along with the Soil Conservation Service and the Food and Nutrition Service, tested the general design of the system for 3 months in late 1987. This effort allowed USDA to not only test the system for GSA, but to study it closely to see if it would be helpful to USDA agencies. Overall, OO found the system to be a good one.

Currently, OO is working with USDA agencies to determine their level of interest in the system. The National Finance Center is determining what systems support will be required to install a real property system in New Orleans. OO is hopeful that the effort spent to test this system for GSA will prove to be beneficial to USDA agencies.

Lease Management

Since signing a formal lease management agreement with the General Services Administration (GSA) in March 1986, USDA agencies have assigned 93 Contracting Officer's Representatives (CORs) to take responsibility for day-to-day management of approximately 1,390,000 square feet of leased space at locations across the country. The Lease Management Delegation Program permits the COR to work directly with building owners rather than through GSA on such matters as heat, telephone connections, partitions, maintenance, and minor repairs, and, in general, ensure that the Government receives all the services described in the lease.

Warehouse Consolidation

In 1985, the Departments of Agriculture and Commerce initiated an innovative experiment in warehouse cross-servicing. The two warehouse sites selected were Kansas City and Washington, D.C. These pilot projects proved that each agency could: (1) operate jointly with little organizational difficulties; (2) take advantage of strengths and weaknesses in existing facilities and operations; (3) improve productivity through development of expertise; and (4) save substantial monies through centralization.

Because of the enthusiastic success of these pilots, Assistant Secretary for Administration John J. Franke, Jr., presented the concept to the President's Council on Management Improvement (PCMI). The Council was impressed and an interagency committee was established to look into the feasibility of consolidating all forms, directives, and publications warehousing activities in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. USDA and Commerce were asked to lead this effort.

The "kick-off" meeting for the PCMI Consolidated Warehousing Steering Committee was held on October 9, 1987, with representatives from all of the major Departments and one representative for small agencies. Following the initial meeting, several smaller working groups were organized to perform specific tasks in the areas of data-gathering, technology, space acquisition, and budget and financial management. An Implementation Team oversees each of these working groups and reports directly to the Steering Committee.

This effort has several goals designed to eliminate many areas of duplication upon full implementation. The current condition of overlapping storage, distribution, and labor services will be reduced in favor of cross-servicing between Departments under single warehousing management control. As a result of more efficient use of shared warehouse facilities and technology, there will be a decrease in the number of warehouses needed to store forms and publications. Also, there will be improved inventory management policies and procedures to ensure maximum accountability. Substantial cost reductions are anticipated upon completion of this project.

Excess Property

Searching for ways to increase USDA's contribution to the 1890 Land Grant Colleges, the Office of Advocacy and Enterprise (OAE) asked USDA's personal property experts for help. They found that there was a program for excess property, but it was not being used effectively. Under Public Law 97-98, enacted December 22, 1981, 1890 Land Grant Colleges and Tuskeegee University became eligible to receive USDA loans of excess property. As a way of making other USDA grant monies to these institutions go further, the Office of Operations worked with OAE to concentrate on promoting the loan of excess property to 1890 Land Grant Colleges. Educational sessions were held, and the colleges were added to the Departmental Excess Personal Property Coordinators' mailing list, which gave them an opportunity to review available excess personal property.

The venture proved quite successful. In FY 1987, colleges obtained over $18 million in excess property to support local USDA programs. This property included lab equipment, vehicles, medical supplies, and construction materials. This was an $8 million increase over FY 1986.

A Bargain Hunter's Dream

The Central Excess Property Operation (CEPO) has expanded services beyond the confines of the South Building to include the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Merit Systems Protection Board. Cooperative agreements with these agencies were signed in early November 1987 and have contributed significantly to the volume of property handled.

Providing reconditioned or excess furniture and equipment to avoid unnecessary procurements continues to be the measure of CEPO's success. In FY 1987, CEPO transferred 6,878 pieces of excess or rehabed furniture and equipment to USDA customers with a cost avoidance savings amounting to $1,069,677. This almost doubled the previous year's savings!

Procurement Automation

Acknowledging the growth of computer usage and recognizing the need for improving procurement support, the Office of Operations' Procurement Division began studying automated contracting systems within the Government. USDA decided the best system to meet its diverse contracting needs was the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Automated Procurement Documentation System (APDS). In cooperation with EPA, USDA procurement personnel customized APDS to meet our

needs, resulting in the Agriculture Contract Automation System (AGCAS).

The AGCAS is designed to select clauses for solicitations and contracts with a dollar value exceeding $25,000. Based on a series of questions and answers, it produces both fixed price and cost reimbursement documents for: supplies, services, construction, architect-engineer services, equipment rental, research and development, and ADPE. Selections also include all ADPE business economic development considerations, various performance locations, dollar values from $25,000 to $10,000,000 and up, and options to extend the term of the contract or increase quantities, to list a few. AGCAS also produces modifications, pre-solicitation notices for construction contracts, and *Commerce Business Daily* synopses. AGCAS is now being used by 10 agencies within USDA at offices across the country.

Facility Modernization

In 1985, the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) developed the framework for a National Facilities Management Plan for the repair, alteration, and maintenance of facilities where high priority research programs are or will be conducted. The objective of the Plan was not to expand ARS facilities, but to correct, improve, or upgrade existing facilities on a priority basis. In 1985 and 1986, a significant number of high priority locations were surveyed for deficiencies, obsolete conditions, and needed alterations. Also, during this time period, eight high priority facilities received special funding for essential improvements.

In 1987, major emphasis was placed on implementation of the program as a nationwide ARS facilities management/modernization plan for top priority Area locations. The focus is (1) Area and Headquarters agreement on priority locations, (2) application of appropriate modernization approach, (3) in-house assessment of needs, (4) identification of Area funding contribution over multiyear period, and (5) scheduling and sequencing of projected activity: i.e., study, design, and construction phasing to coincide with anticipated funding.

Completion of the major tasks under this comprehensive national program will take 10 years or more to accomplish. ARS is committed to fulfillment of its National Facilities Management Plan to assure availability of state-of-the-art facilities for priority ARS programs for the foreseeable future.

Physical Security

On June 12, 1987, the Office of Operations (OO) started processing the new USDA Identification Access Badges (ID), with the assistance of high school and college students. The new ID (AD-1030) is a distinct improvement over the old ID (AD-422), which resembled the drivers' licenses of the District of Columbia and Maryland. The new ID picture is large; the mustard color stands out; and, the Security Guards can readily identify non-USDA employees. OO processed 8,000 IDs during the phase-in period, and over 10,000 IDs have been processed to date.

The new IDs became mandatory on September 1, 1987. Since then, unauthorized entry has gone down 95 percent and the crime rate is down 60 percent. The new IDs are definitely providing a safer and more secure environment for USDA employees.

Simplifying Procurement

The Forest Service (FS) is participating with the Department of Commerce in testing the use of a bankcard for low-dollar-value small purchases. The project, authorized by the Office of Management and Budget's Office of Federal Procurement Policy, uses a commercial bank's MasterCard in place of imprest cash and field purchase orders for small purchase transactions up to $1,000 in value. Five units in the FS Eastern Region (headquartered in Milwaukee) are using bankcards and plan to expand the test to include two other units. The FS is also cooperating with the National Finance Center (NFC) and USDA's Office of Operations in designing an automated version of the system that will be housed at NFC and will allow for electronic processing of bankcard invoices and payments. The bankcard is one of several Government initiatives to simplify Federal agency procurement procedures.

Procurement Workshops

The Soil Conservation Service (SCS) conducted four contract claims workshops for its contracting officers, construction engineers, and water resource program personnel to improve their skills in avoiding contract claims, writing contracting officer decisions, and handling contract claims. SCS writes about $80 million in construction contracts each year. Any losses in contract claims reduces the funds available for additional construction. The workshops were presented by professional construction contract claims consultants, skilled in preparing claims and in defending against claims. SCS contracting officers and other personnel are now better qualified to guard against claims and to prepare decision papers that will present stronger positions for the government in contract disputes.

Automated Purchasing System

The Economics Management Staff (EMS), in conjunction with the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), has developed an Automated Purchasing System (APS). EMS for some time has been trying to improve its small purchasing services through automation and NASS has wanted to automate its administrative functions. By mutual agreement, both agencies decided procurement, specifically the small purchases area, was a good place to start.

APS' most important features include: (1) the ability to receive AD-700s electronically from EMS' serviced agencies (currently only NASS); (2) the use of much AD-700 information in the preparation of the AD-838, Purchase Order, without retyping; (3) the establishment of a data base of all pending and completion actions that will be used to prepare a wide variety of management reports; and (4) the preparation of all purchase orders using data base screen processing rather than standard typing methods.

EMS is confident that the APS will increase the speed and accuracy with which an AD-700 can be processed. The status reports, which will soon be readily available to the ordering offices, should significantly reduce the time spent by EMS in responding to numerous telephone calls for information. Beginning in FY 1987, the staff used the system to prepare all purchase orders and to build a data base of critical procurement information. The system operates on a large, powerful Martin Marietta time-sharing network. All NASS offices can electronically produce and transmit their AD-700s to the EMS Procurement Section. They are also able to check on the status of any pending AD-700 and capture all information on

Modernization of laboratory space for the ARS Plant Gene Expression Center, Albany, California

completed purchase orders as soon as they enter the data base. Also, information from previous orders, whether it is the constant information required on all orders from an office or the details of any order being requested again by the same or another office, can be electronically copied onto new AD-700s as they are being developed by the ordering office.

Area Office Consolidation

In May 1987, the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) initiated efforts to consolidate the functions of its 11 Area offices into 8 Areas. This adjustment was part of a major streamlining of ARS Headquarters and field organizations initiated in 1983. At that time, ARS established its 11 Area offices reporting directly to the Administrator, a significant reduction from the 25 field reporting relationships in the previous organization.

Experience with the 11 Area offices over 3 years demonstrated to ARS management that further improvements in the management and support of ARS research programs, and significant additional savings in overhead, could be achieved by consolidating the 11 into 8 Areas. Adjustments were accomplished by September 1987, resulting in savings of 20 FTEs and $1.0 million, with improved program direction and increased service efficiency provided to ARS field activities.

Personnel Management

Entry Level Program

In fiscal year 1987, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) implemented a centrally coordinated Entry Level Program for the recruitment and training of professionals at the GS-5 and GS-7 level. Twenty-seven (27) extremely talented entry level trainees were recruited and hired through this program. By having such a specialized Entry Level Program, FNS increased its competitiveness in attracting high quality candidates. Recruiting for a central pool of talent proved to be cost-effective for the Agency since individual recruitment visits were not necessary.

Trainees had the opportunity to receive an overview of FNS through a national training session. In addition, trainees received on-the-job training for from 6 months to 1 year. Management then had the opportunity to permanently select from an excellent group of individuals who had systematic exposure to FNS policies and procedures.

An evaluation of the Entry Level Program at Headquarters concluded that it was a complete success. The major goal, which was to bring on board talented

individuals by means of a centrally coordinated, systematic program, was accomplished. Headquarters and Regional Offices were extremely satisfied with the candidates they hired and want another Entry Level Program implemented in the future.

Handicapped Employee Program

The Department's current goal, as set by Secretary Lyng, is to increase the representation of employees with targeted disabilities to 1 percent of the USDA workforce. To this end, the Department's National Employ the Handicapped (NETH) Week activities focused on recruitment and employment of persons with disabilities and adopted the theme, "Making Employment a Reality."

Prior to the official opening of NETH Week, a workshop on interviewing techniques (as applied to the applicant with disabilities) was held. About 80 persons, comprised of USDA managers, supervisors, personnel officers, and selective placement coordinators participated. The workshop addressed the common but valid concerns employers have about hiring persons with handicapping conditions. In addition, the Secretary's policy of ensuring full equality of opportunity for all persons, regardless of handicap, and the NETH Week program activities were covered.

The NETH Week program, in addition to the awards ceremony at which 20 USDA disabled employees and their supervisors were recognized, featured the first Departmental "Job Fair for Persons with Disabilities." This Job Fair offered managers and supervisors the opportunity both to meet with rehabilitation counselors and discuss the vocational implications of particular disabilities and interview prescreened applicants. The highly successful nature of this endeavor is evidenced by agency requests to hold another Job Fair and by these recruiting statistics:

- Fourteen (14) USDA agencies made 58 positions available
- Seventy-six (76) interviews were conducted which resulted in 31 tentative job offers and 13 hires

Left to Right: Presenting awards—Karen Darling, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Marketing and Inspection Services, Perry Tillman, Systems Accountant, NFC, "Outstanding Handicapped Employee of the Year at USDA," and Clyde McShan, Director, NFC

Due to the extensive efforts by agency and Office of Personnel employees, this Job Fair showed what cooperative efforts to promote employment of the disabled can do.

Administrative Training

In 1987, special emphasis was placed on activities and programs which would increase the ability of Agricultural Research Service (ARS) administrative personnel to provide professional, knowledgeable, and competent administrative support services throughout the Agency. The primary elements of this initiative were to: (1) implement a comprehensive Location Administrative Officer Training Plan; (2) develop in-house administrative training modules covering key functional areas; (3) recruit administrative trainees from in-house; and (4) conduct a National Administrative Officer Conference.

As a result, virtually all Location Administrative Officers received important training during FY 1987. The attendant training plan anticipates completion of all required courses by FY 1991. In-house training modules were developed covering such diverse areas as personnel management, automated systems, acquisition, financial management, property management, and hazardous waste management.

A total of seven administrative trainees were hired in 1987, all of whom have been assigned to Area offices during their period of training. Four (4) trainees, hired earlier, graduated in 1987 and successfully competed for vacant ARS Administrative Officer positions.

Additionally, a National Administrative Officer Conference was held in March 1987. It included functional breakout sessions covering 15 key administrative areas. A number of high level USDA and ARS guests made presentations on specialized topics of current significance. The Conference proceedings helped to focus the attention of ARS administrative personnel on those priority subject areas which contribute the most to achievement of the Agency's mission and how related job performance can be maximized.

Audit Training Academy

The Office of Inspector General's (OIG) overall mission is to prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse in USDA programs and operations. The OIG accomplishes this mission through the conduct of audits and investigations. The complexity and size of the Department requires that OIG employees acquire and maintain a commensurate diversity of skills to deal with multiple and differing programs and that they have a clear understanding of USDA responsibilities. Since this knowledge cannot be obtained in the private sector, and recognizing that training is a powerful and critical tool in employee development, the Inspector General has established an OIG Audit Training Academy. The Academy is designed to provide both broad-based and very specific instruction for entry-level and career auditors. Its objectives include:

- Orienting newly hired auditors to the audit process and the USDA OIG organization;
- Giving practice in performing the audit steps; and
- Presenting the entire audit process as an integrated whole instead of separate parts.

Course delivery techniques include an integrated case study given throughout most of the core modules, self-checks to provide first hand experience and practice, on-going feedback and evaluation, and a

Tom Howell (back turned) leads breakout session of Administrative personnel at 1987 ARS National Administrative Conference

concluding instructional game representing an actual audit. Although initially given to newly-hired, entry-level auditors, the Inspector General envisions that the Academy will eventually serve as a model for auditor training at all skill levels.

Central Mail Unit Sets Example

The Office of Operations (OO) is in the process of hiring five additional GS-1 temporary mail clerks through the Center for the Handicapped, Silver Spring, Maryland. These new employees will be assigned to the Mail Preparation Unit of the Department's Central Mail Room. This hiring will result in employment of 10 handicapped employees—representing 17 percent of the total human resources of the Department's Central Mail Services. OO continues to fully support this program, and is equally confident that these new employees will join other employees in becoming long-term, productive and dependable employees who provide dedicated service to the Department.

Clerical Testing

A written test covering 61 clerical occupations in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Area is now being administered by the Office of Personnel. The test is scored by an optical scanner with results made available to applicants the same day they take it. With a passing score, the applicants may immediately be offered any job covered by the exam for which they are eligible. In summary, it is now feasible for clerical applicants to take the written examination and, if they pass, be offered a job in any of 61 clerical occupations at grades GS-2, 3, or 4 in the same day.

Vacancy Announcements

Prior to implementation of the Vacancy Announcement System through Telemail (VAST), the Departmental recruitment bulletin was time and paper intensive. Agency personnelists composed the vacancy listing, typed it, and mailed or hand-carried it each week to the Office of Personnel. VAST has removed these manual procedures and made the product more professional looking and accurate.

With VAST, agency personnelists compose the vacancy announcement listings and input them via Telemail, the Departmental electronic mail system. A series of questions and edits tailored to personnel regulations ensure the accuracy of the vacancy lists. At the cutoff date each week, VAST captures all of the vacancies that have been input, sorts them automatically, and puts them into the correct format. The information is then put onto a floppy disk and transferred from the disk to camera ready copy and sent for printing. Additional enhancements for VAST are planned for FY 1988.

Automating Training

A Training Information System (TRAI) has been developed at USDA that automates the preparation of the SF-182, Training Form, entry of training information data, and the preparation of management reports. TRAI is an online system which permits Agency entry of data housed at the National Finance Center. The system eliminates the processing of paper copies of the SF-182, increases the accuracy of the information, and permits timely management reporting.

TRAI is being augmented by the development of a Training Payment System (TRAP) which will permit the electronic authorization of payment for approved training activities. TRAP also eliminates the processing of an additional paper copy of the SF-182.

New Retirement System Implemented

On January 1, 1987, several thousand USDA employees were converted to the new Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS). One of the initial problems the Department faced was to train personnel specialists on this highly complex system—a system involving not only a Basic Annuity, but also Social Security and a Thrift Savings Plan (TSP). Since there were no experts within the Federal sector to rely on, a series of week-long sessions were contracted for from those who had been closely involved with the passage of the Act. USDA took the lead, but achieved economy of scale by inviting the Department of Commerce and others to participate and share the lowered rates. Additional 3-day courses on aspects of Social Security were scheduled in a like manner.

Implementing the FERS Act was complicated by the fact that most employees were given the chance to elect FERS coverage. The decisions employees faced were not only complex, but irrevocable, making it imperative that they have adequate and accurate information to make their decisions. In addition to the roles played by individual agencies in disseminating information and counseling employees, the Department became involved at three different points:

- Coordinating the distribution of more than 1 million booklets and forms for three TSP Open Seasons and for the FERS Transfer Period;

- Arranging for centralized reproduction of nearly 1,200 videotapes at greatly reduced prices;

• Negotiating special procedures with the Social Security Administration for early delivery of forms to request one's Social Security earnings history, a critical piece of information for an informed transfer decision.

EEO Counselor Project

During 1987, the Employee Appeals Staff of the Office of Personnel put into place a pilot full-time Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) counselor project covering all USDA employees in the Washington, D.C., area, Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia, Delaware, and Pennsylvania. The objective of the counselor, the first contact in the EEO complaint process, is to resolve as many contacts as possible. Collateral counselors have historically resolved 70 to 75 percent of all contacts. There have been 192 contacts with the full-time counselor through November 30, 1987. One hundred and fifty (150) of these complaints have been closed or resolved, 12 have gone formal and 30 are still in the counseling stage. There has been a 93% closed/resolution rate.

Partnership is USDA's Future

Another step forward in coordinating the efforts of the personnel and civil rights/equal employment opportunity communities in USDA took place with the joint Civil Rights/Employment Officers Workshop held in September of this year. The result of brainstorming sessions between Employment and EEO staffs, the Workshop was designed to improve working relationships and communications in support of future mission accomplishments, particularly when needed human resources are expected to be scarce. The Workshop's theme of "Partnership is USDA's Future" emphasized its major goal of strengthening the ties and building new ones between the Employment and EEO communities.

Workshop sessions were constructed around four topical areas: planning for the future workforce, enhancing communications, recruitment and outreach, and working together for organizational commitment. Key speakers and panel members participated from a variety of governmental, academia, nonprofit and profit organizations. Following the Workshop, a work group was formed to develop concrete recommendations for consideration by the Employment and EEO communities. These recommendations are to be based on the concerns and ideas arising from the Workshop discussions.

Symposium for Predominantly Black 2-Year Colleges

In February 1987, USDA and the Department of Interior (DOI) jointly sponsored a National Symposium on Opportunities for Predominantly Black 2-year Colleges. The principal objectives of the Symposium were to:

1. acquaint/orient DOI and USDA managers and staff with the administrators of the 2-year colleges, as well as their faculty, students and curriculums;

2. orient officials administering Cooperative Education and/or Placement Programs to current DOI and USDA career opportunities and placement procedures;

3. establish communication channels between DOI and USDA educational personnel and other managers and officials from the 2-year institutions; stress the potential for articulation between 2 and 4-year colleges; and

4. identify and organize methods and means to assure the regular exchange of educational and other relevant information between participating DOI and USDA agencies and the 2-year colleges.

Civil Rights Management

As a result of the Secretary's Civil Rights Policy Statement in June 1986, civil rights and equal employment opportunity received increased management attention within USDA in 1987. Several specific steps were taken to improve the Department's position in this vital management area.

First, employees and the public were made aware of the priority accorded civil rights in Department management operations through widespread dissemination of the Secretary's CiVil Rights Policy Statement, as well as meetings and speeches before public and private groups. Secondly, a program of widespread civil rights training was initiated within USDA to equip managers and supervisors with the knowledge and understanding of how to carry out their civil rights responsibilities under law. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, a program of managerial civil rights performance standards was begun for senior executive managers, making civil rights a critical element in expected performance of the job. In 1988, a civil rights performance standards system will be extended to all managers and supervisors in USDA. These steps are expected to result in significant improvements in the Department's civil rights record.

Civil Rights Council

In 1987, a Council of Agency Civil Rights Directors was reconstituted with its own set of officers and new operating procedures. The purpose was (1) to bring the civil rights functions more into the mainstream of management operations within USDA in line with the Secretary's Civil Rights Policy Statement; (2) to provide a Department-wide forum for the civil rights function similar to that which already exists for other management functions; (3) to provide a mechanism for improving communications and coordination of civil rights concerns within the Department; and (4) to provide Departmental Administration with a broad and flexible feedback and advisory mechanism in the area of civil rights and equal employment opportunity.

During 1987, the Civil Rights Council was active in providing guidance for an Equal Employment Opportunity Conference in September and on various resource issues associated with implementation of the Secretary's Civil Rights Policy Statement. In addition, the Council has provided important advice to the Secretary and the Office of Advocacy and Enterprise on ways to improve the civil rights and equal employment opportunity posture of USDA. In 1988, the Council hopes to recommend a Long Range Civil Rights Agenda for the Department of Agriculture.

Automated Personnel Services

The Extension Services' Personnel and Management Services Division (PMSD) located in the Cooperative Management Staff provides personnel services to approximately 350 employees in two agencies. Although the size of the personnel office is commensurate with the size of the serviced area, this organization is expected to provide a full range of personnel services and program support. During FY 1987, automated data processing capabilities were greatly expanded to maximize the effectiveness of the staff.

During the first quarter, PMSD went on line with the National Finance Center (NFC) for processing of personnel actions. This included the purchase of terminals, printers, and a controller, as well as leasing TELENET services. Considerable staff time was invested in training and experimenting with the system to attain full utilization of available automated capabilities. Throughout the year, additional capabilities were added. During the fourth quarter, PMSD converted to the latest personnel action processing system.

This system will become mandatory for all agencies during FY 1988. Personnel actions are now printed on site, saving several weeks in processing and mailing time. As a result, the amount of paper transmitted between NFC and PMSD has been reduced to less than 5% of its level in FY 1986. In addition to the time savings, the problem of lost or misplaced documents has been virtually eliminated. Inquiries from managers and employees can be answered immediately rather than spending hours on the telephone or waiting for responses to written inquiries. The current information is invaluable to accurate and timely processing of personnel actions.

The increased capabilities have led to increasing numbers of staff members involved in processing actions. Instead of submitting all processing to a central location as in the past, units can now control their own processing priorities. A management study conducted in the fourth quarter concluded that processing could be accomplished more effectively if the capability was available in the units rather than in a central location. This would enable individuals processing actions to remain at their regular worksites to access regulations and other material. A contractor was engaged to provide cabeling from all offices of the controller. A plan of action describes additional capabilities to be developed in future years. New terminals will be in the form of PCs with terminal emulation which can also perform word processing, data base management, spreadsheets and other management tasks. PCs have been installed in the Position Classification and Employee Development Branch and the Employment and Employee Relations Branch of PMSD. Terminals, which had previously been located in a dedicated computer room, have been moved to the desks of individuals whose duties include intensive processing. The distribution of the processing function has allowed the Division to provide increased office and telephone coverage and more effectively use available staff resources.

Generic Training

The Office of Personnel's Executive Development and Training Staff (EDTS) has completed the initial phase of the Generic Training vendor selection process. Over 200 potential vendors were invited to make presentations as part of "USDA Vendor Days." One hundred (100) of the vendors contacted were provided by the Office of Advocacy and Enterprise's Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization and included minority and female owned businesses. A total of 83 vendors made presentations; 28 were selected for additional evaluation, and 7 were designated as alternates. Final selection will depend on the quality of the proposed pilot program and the cost for the program.

EDTS has conducted a pilot session and 2 subsequent deliveries of a course based on Generic Training Module 16, "Employee Selection and Hiring." The sessions have trained a total of 52 USDA employees. Efforts are being concentrated on an early delivery date for a course based on Module 6, "Drug, Alcohol and Controlled Substances Education Program." The Drug Abuse program will include both a "traditional class room" session and a video tape component.

Productivity Improvement

Technology Development and Applications

As part of engineering support, the Forest Service (FS) has a technology development and applications program. This program is akin to the development side of corporate research and development programs. As such, it complements activities carried out by FS research organizations. The purpose of this program is to develop or identify new technology and to assist in adapting it to all phases of land management. The bulldozer, the mainstay of today's construction industry worldwide, was conceived and developed through this program during the 1930s. Annually, numerous new ideas, methods, systems, material, information, and equipment are brought into use that improve efficiency. The following are some examples.

Substitute Earth Anchors. FS has developed new anchoring methods for cable logging systems. Large tree stumps are used as anchors to guy towers and skylines for timber harvest. However, in some areas the stumps are not adequate in size or in the proper location; thus, the need for better anchoring methods. Engineers at the San Dimas Technology and Development Center developed two types of tipping plate anchors; one for depths of 10 to 15 feet, the other for 5 to 7 feet. The deep plates have demonstrated capacities of from 500 to 200,000 pounds; the shallow ones from 10 to 40 pounds, depending on the depth of installation and the soil type. FS is transferring this new technology to the logging industry; which will enable them to employ environmentally preferred log yarding systems at reduced costs.

Satellite Position Location Systems. Rapid development of satellite based navigation position location systems have progressed to the point where they now provide an economical method of obtaining spacial location of resource data. Missoula Technology and Development Center, in cooperation with the University of Montana, established a test course at Lubrict Experimental Forest for evaluation of this equipment. These evaluations will help managers select the proper equipment for the jobs to be performed and will aid rapid adoption of this new technology.

Reduced Truck Tire Pressures. Recent Department of Defense Research and Development has provided systems that allow vehicle operators to vary tire pressures while a vehicle is in motion. Preliminary studies conducted by San Dimas Technology and Development Engineers indicated that the use of lowered logging truck tire pressures in low speed applications increased vehicle mobility; reduced vehicle operating costs; reduced driver fatigue; and reduced road construction and maintenance costs. Within the next 6 months this technology will be put to use in the Forest Products industry through incentives and requirements included in Timber Sale contracts.

Work Crew Safety. Proper training for work supervisors is important where field crews perform hazardous tasks or work in a hazardous environment. Missoula Technology and Development Center Staff prepared a training course for first line crew supervisors. The course draws on the

unique work culture of FS crews showing that productive crews are safe crews and that production and safety are interdependent.

Remote Sensing Training and Awareness. During FY 1987, the Nationwide Forestry Applications Program conducted a program to develop and maintain aerial photographic interpretation skills for resource technicians and professionals. The program is designed to train 300–400 employees each year.

A significant new approach was adopted by the Rocky Mountain Region on the Bighorn National Forest to map and classify riparian management areas using high altitude infrared color aerial photography acquired by the National Air and Space Administration, Ames Research Center. Current development, in cooperation with the Rocky Mountain Region, Range and Wildlife Staff, and the Forest, is focused on monitoring riparian management areas to assess the effects of management prescriptions under the Forest Land Management Plan. Similar applications of remote sensing technology are being used to improve forest plantation stocking and survival surveys, to map gypsy moth defoliation in the Northeastern United States, to assess the impact of hardwood decline in the South, and to provide important data for planning resource recovery after major fires.

Contracting Out

In 1987, the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) continued its emphasis on having a proper mix of in-house and contract performance of Agency tasks. The A-76 review process was applied in the analysis of Agency support functions to improve productivity and maximize the use of vital Agency resources. Program and administrative management personnel participated in the identification and pursuit of specific A-76 actions and reviews for 1987.

Current major locations/activities under review include the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center; the U.S. National Arboretum, Washington, D.C.; the Western Regional Research Center, Albany, California; and the National Animal Disease Center, Ames, Iowa. Approximately 270 facility support positions are involved in the reviews. Savings from in-house resources realized through these A-76 efforts will be redirected to satisfy higher priority program needs.

Office Automation

The Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service's (ASCS) primary function is to service the public through the administration of farm price support and conservation cost share programs. ASCS has traditionally been an innovator in developing ways of improving the delivery of these services, and one of the principal efforts currently underway is the State and County Office Automation Project (SCOAP). SCOAP involves every segment of the Agency, from program delivery to management support operations, in the installation of automated information processing technology in all ASCS State and county offices. Most ASCS county office operations have a direct impact on the public and, with ASCS offices in nearly every county of the United States, the timeliness and quality of these services to the public are highly visible.

Productivity Gains. SCOAP progress indicates that productivity gains are already being realized. Some applications now in place are Producer Sign-up (computer generated worksheets and contracts providing producers with more extensive information on the options available to them), Price Support and Loans (the first completely integrated programmatic and accounting application), Electronic Record Maintenance, Farm Reconstitutions, generation of Notices of Yields and Bases for producers, and Program Commodity Payments, among others. As other applications are brought on-line, additional productivity gains will result. Complex manual processes are now being reduced to relatively simple screen prompts. Processing time for individual transactions will be reduced; report generation will be considerably faster; and, producer sign-ups will be simplified. Workloads associated with administrative procedures, information flow and retrieval, and data storage are being streamlined for greater efficiency.

Public Impact. Many of these improvements are now impacting the public. Waiting time in county offices has been reduced, as well as the number of trips producers must make to the offices. This allows producers more time to get on with their work, reducing much of the administrative burden placed on them in the manual environment of the past. Under SCOAP, the public will also benefit directly from the implementation of Peanut Smart Cards, a state-of-the-art application using a tiny computer chip containing producer marketing information on a "credit card." The Smart Card is used by the producer to speed up the marketing process. Positive results have already been realized by the use of these cards. A Tobacco Smart Card is also under development. Full value of all projected SCOAP benefits will begin to accrue in FY 1989, after all software applications are fully developed and installed.

As full SCOAP implementation is accomplished, an additional benefit will result. During the two years the 1985 Farm Bill has been in place, country office workload has increased dramatically because of the farm program changes themselves and the general state of the farm economy. This increased workload has left little time for county office employees to adequately explain program benefits to farmers and producers. By streamlining many processes through SCOAP, county office employees will be afforded the time to discuss program options and benefits with producers and farmers. Since the long term health of the Nation's farm economy depends on the success of the farm bill, it is extremely important that potential participants are familiar with the benefits available to them. SCOAP will improve this situation by giving county office employees more discretionary time.

In addition to some of the primary applications of SCOAP, another application will allow the transmission of program directives and instructions to county offices electronically from Washington headquarters. County employees can then access instructions quickly, on terminal screens at their desks.

County operations, encompassing all ASCS offices' functions and selected Federal offices' support operations, are included in the President's Productivity Improvement Program (PIP). Productivity improvements resulting from SCOAP and other initiatives are being monitored to document actual time savings. At both the county level and in Kansas City, most productivity improvements will result in direct service improvements to the public. Participation in the President's PIP sets a goal for ASCS to improve productivity by a

total of 20 percent between FY 1986 and FY 1991.

Audit Strategies

In FY 1987, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) initiated a strategic planning process designed to provide the greatest degree of audit coverage, with maximum audit results, using scarce resources. The OIG strategic planning process involves the identification of specific program target areas and the development of issues for in-depth audits. This process provides greater planning flexibility because OIG can focus audit efforts on issues which impact on several programs. For example, OIG has strategies which cover Farm Programs, Market Development, Financial Management, and Procurement. All involve multiple programs and agencies. Each strategy has specific objectives, background, and a detailed analysis from which OIG develops their annual Audit Program. The strategic planning process has helped OIG improve the way audits are planned and has given OIG greater control of its resources.

Susan Stonesifer, Program Assistant in ASCS Carroll County, Maryland, reviews aerial photography with producers filing their acreage reports

Office Productivity

In mid-1987, The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) acquired the Office Productivity Network (OPN) system which is an integrated software package that provides an interface with word processing, electronic spreadsheets, and calendars. The OPN facilitates full microcomputer emulation and error correcting file transfer capabilities with a user-friendly menu driven system. In addition, the scheduling and calendar options provides AMS with a cost-effective, electroncially responsive method of coordinating activities of top level Agency management. Approximately 300 users have been trained on the use of the OPN system.

Billings and Collections

Beginning in April 1988, the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) will send batch transmissions of billing data, in lieu of mailing hard-copy documents, to the National Finance Center (NFC) for processing through the Billing and Collection System (BLCO). AMS program personnel will enter the data into a microcomputer from the hard-copy document. The data will be formatted into batches of 50 records and transmitted biweekly to NFC. Edits built into the AMS database programs will significantly reduce error rejects after transmission to NFC. Future applications of the databases maintained on the microcomputer include computer checking of the data processed by NFC to ensure that all data is correctly reported. Currently, this procedure is performed manually.

Major costs savings and benefits are expected. The error reject rate will decrease from 41 percent to 5 percent, resulting in the costs associated with error rejects to decrease. Mail and NFC data entry costs will be eliminated. Bills will be sent out in a more timely manner (during the current billing cycle). As a result, revenues should be received more expediently. AMS has investment authority for its user fee funds. Assuming that revenues will be received in a more timely manner, and based on late billings during FY 1987 (a result of mail lag time), AMS anticipates an increase in investment income.

Motor Vehicle Reforms

In 1985, the Department began to implement the recommendations in the Productivity Improvement Report on Vehicle Services. As a result, the motor vehicle budget was reduced by $11 million in FY 1987, and other recommendations, when fully implemented, could save approximately $23 million annually. In FY 1987, the Department:

- Developed and issued standard specifications for motor vehicles, establishing a far more standardized fleet which has resulted in significant savings in acquisition and operations costs;

- Worked with the General Services Administration (GSA) to implement new vehicle disposal requirements, including a shorter disposal cycle and an increase in small lot sales authority to $5,000. This has resulted in USDA agencies being able to take vehicle disposal action if GSA cannot sell the vehicles within 60 days. This reduces storage, deterioration, vandalism problems and increases sales revenue;

- Implemented changes in GSA's consolidated purchasing program, resulting in shortened procurement cycles and better delivery schedules;

- Implemented revisions GSA has made for vehicle maintenance contracts. The major change is that GSA has set up Basic Ordering Agreements with a number of contractors in each service area establishing set flat rate charges for services. Agencies now have the choice of using listed contractors or establishing their own

local contracts taking into consideration location and cost.

• Assembled a task force to revise and update the Equipment Management Information System taking into consideration recommendations in the report and requirements of the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985. This project is expected to take approximately one year to complete.

Agencies operating vehicle repair shops and fuel-dispensing facilities have implemented value analysis studies and are in the process of closing those facilities no longer considered cost effective.

Use of Special Work Groups

During 1987, Administrative Management in the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) took additional steps to involve field administrative and program personnel in reviewing and recommending improvement actions in high impact activities. Key examples were: PC Oversight Committee, Location Automation Task Force, Location Support Study Panel, Automated Procurement Task Force, and various user panels for ongoing and developing ADP administrative applications and training efforts.

These work groups were formed to assess potential areas for improvement, as well as to identify, analyze, and solve problems present in a variety of management and operational activities. A prime objective of the groups has been to identify actions that will improve productivity, timeliness and quality of support services, and the quality of work-life of personnel at all levels of the ARS organization.

Special efforts were made to rotate a number of field personnel on these project assignments to broaden the involvement of Location and Area people and to provide a wide range of perspectives and experience levels into these group deliberations.

It is expected that this wider involvement of field personnel in Agency policy-making activities will expand the knowledge base for key ARS program efforts and help assure the success of operational systems when implemented on a nationwide basis. Fuller participation of ARS personnel in the decision-making process will provide greater impetus and acceptance of technological and other changes in the future.

National Pilot Study

The Forest Service (FS), like most Federal agencies, has built up a large and costly system of policies, processes, and procedures over the years to implement the hundreds of laws and regulations affecting it. To efficiently meet the expected demands for goods and services from the nation's forestland in an era of declining budgets, FS must dramatically reduce this bureaucratic workload and shift resources to more productive use.

To do so, FS initiated the "National Pilot Study" in 1985, in which four National Forests and a Research Station were designated to test a looser control structure that fostered innovation and creativity. The units were granted:

• flexibility within basic policy and legal bounds to achieve agreed-upon output targets and objectives, including waivers from certain requirements;

• budgets allocated by appropriation rather than numerous line items;

• a process whereby ideas for productive change are generated from the bottom of the organization upward and approved if legal and worth testing; and

• freedom to apply savings to other high priority work.

In view of the study's success in 1986, FS expanded the study in 1987 to include an entire Region and another Research Station. In addition, some Regional Foresters initiated numerous "pilot-type" efforts within the scope of their own authorities. Test results through 1987 have continued to be extremely positive and exciting. Many of the costly bureaucratic controls are being relinquished without undue waste or misuse. At the same time, productivity has increased and service to the public has improved. A renewed organizational spirit among the test unit employees is generating thousands of new ideas to achieve the FS mission more efficiently and effectively. FS will continue the Pilot Study with the expectation that the spirit and changes generated will ultimately be transferred to the entire organization, creating a better management climate, higher employee motivation, and overall increased productivity.

The Pilot Study is also influencing other Government agencies and private organizations. FS has made presentations on the principles and benefits of the Pilot-operating philosophy to other Department of Agriculture agencies, the National Air and Space Administration Symposium on Quality and Productivity, the Veterans Administration, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Senior Executive Association, the Federal Executive Institute, the Bureau of Land Management, the City of Milwaukee, the Oregon Department of Natural Resources, etc. A FS statement describing the nature of "risk-taking" employed in the Pilot Study was distributed and endorsed within Eastman Kodak Company. FS anticipates continued strong interest by many public and private leaders who are enthusiastic about the potential application of Pilot principles to their own organizations.

Enhancing Employee Skills

The Soil Conservation Service (SCS) is making major changes to its national training program after reviewing the results of an internal productivity improvement study. "As a technical agency, maintaining a high level of expertise is crucial to effectively carrying out our congressional mandates," relayed John Peterson, Deputy Chief for Administration. "Quality training is essential to keeping this expertise at a high level." As a result, several new initiatives are underway in SCS to strengthen basic skills, managerial and technical training. Two of these initiatives are use of proficiency models and management training.

Proficiency Models. To strengthen the consistency and content of all training, SCS prepared a detailed proficiency model for every SCS position and grade. A proficiency model is a description of training and experience to be attained for a defined level of competence. Each model is based on thorough task analysis and expected proficiency level. Many models also include an estimate of the hours needed to complete the training to the prescribed proficiency level. Almost 13,000 SCS employees are covered by these models. After receiving the proficiency plan, each employee discusses it with the supervisor and together they tailor the employee development plan for that indi-

vidual's needs. They review the plan each year to note progress and training yet to be scheduled.

Management Training. "Management training takes on a special role in a technical agency such as SCS," said John Peterson, "where most of our managers come from technical backgrounds. As a rule, our managers move up to management without the academic credentials or preparation to effectively make that transition." To correct what John referred to as "...a serious deficiency in managerial development," John is chairing a task force which is guiding the complete redesign of SCS's management training from entry level through the SES. The first courses of the redesigned training will be conducted in fiscal year 1988.

Electronic Access Expanded

During 1987, the National Finance Center worked closely with client agencies to expand electronic access to the Center's systems from remote locations. Sixty-five (65) agencies are now submitting electronic Time and Attendance Reports (T&As), up from 34 agencies in 1986. A total of 2,691,895 T&As (63.4 percent of those submitted) were electronically transmitted. Increased utilization of electronic transmission has resulted in substantially lower T&A rejections, thus enhancing productivity. On the personnel side, 60 agencies are now entering transactions through the Payroll/Personnel Remote Entry System; 899,995 online transactions were transmitted in 1987.

Many new systems were put online for client agencies. New payroll/personnel subsystems included the Position Management System, Incident Reporting System, and Training Information System. In the field of financial information, the Federal Assistance Awards Data System, a redesigned Management Accounting Structure Codes System, a redesigned Budget and Operating Plans Data Base System, and the Departmentwide Financial Information System were implemented. Online entry of purchase order receipts became available, and a personal computer version of the online Purchase Order System was developed. Also implemented was the Remote Batch Telecommunications Protocol.

Ad hoc online report generation and retrieval continued to grow and improve significantly. By the end of the year, NFC had 20 data bases available to users for the purpose of data retrieval. During the year, a total of 41 agencies generated 121,576 reports electronically.

The vast expansion of electronic access has improved productivity, greatly increased user satisfaction, and significantly enhanced the availability of management information.

Reducing Support Costs

Changes of major significance in Soil Conservation Service (SCS) field office management procedures are increasing the solid and water conservation activities and improving the productivity of field office staff. The streamlining changes are simplification of a cumbersome timekeeping system, merging budget offset into the new system, and elevating the plan of work as a management tool. The effects of these changes, in addition to increased productivity, are elimination or reduction of burdensome management requirements, more timely progress reports for managers, and improved employee morale.

Basic to the SCS field office management system is the plan of operations. This plan includes accomplishment goals for each employee for the ongoing conservation programs. The plan of operations indicates staff years needed for conservation work and is justification for the financial codes to be used by field office staff people. This is the budget offset component. Previously, SCS field office employees kept extensive, detailed records of the hours spent on various activities and reported these hours by financial codes assigned to conservation programs. Data from these reports were used by program and financial managers to determine where program dollars were spent.

Results of the changes are very impressive. In FY 1986, the number of landowners contacted to provide conservation assistance increased by 13.3 percent over FY 1985 even though the number of field staff decreased slightly. Paperwork and data handling for SCS by USDA units were reduced by an estimated 30 percent. Since implementing the new timekeeping system throughout SCS at the beginning of FY 1987, it is estimated that each field office employee is saving at least 3 hours per pay period by not having to keep tedious, time-consuming records of conservation activities for payroll purposes. This translates into estimated savings of about 250 staff years annually. These staff years are now available for high priority work. Since field office staffs are small (generally ranging from one to three people), the disaggregated savings cannot be translated into staff reductions.

The new system focuses on the conservation output of our efforts. This has a very positive effect on SCS field office personnel. Work schedules are more efficient. Program coordination within SCS is improving because of the priorities established in the plan of work. The morale of employees has improved because burdensome paperwork is eliminated. Field staffs throughout the agency (the ultimate judges) welcome these changes and have been highly complimentary. For this significant accomplishment, four SCS managers received the USDA Administrative Management Award.

Economic Research Service Reorganization

In fiscal year 1987, the Economic Research Service (ERS) was reorganized in order to fully integrate the domestic and international perspective and improve the linkages among all components of the ERS program.

The reorganization affected all four program divisions; however, the primary impact was a realignment of the functions and resources of the National Economics Division (NED) and International Economics Division (IED). The NED program focused on all aspects of the domestic agricultural economy, while IED concentrated primarily on international agricultural issues. These two divisions were abolished in the reorganization and were replaced with two new divisions, the Commodity Economics Division (CED) and the Agricultural Trade and Analysis Division (ATAD). The CED is primarily responsible for all activities—situation and outlook, staff analysis, and research—directly related to the production and utilization of major agricultural commodities, both domestic and international. The new ATAD, on the other hand, focuses on agricultural and trade policy issues both domestic and international.

Because of the reorganization, the role of senior commodity analysts has been strengthened and their visibility in-

creased. The ERS program dealing with domestic and international aspects of agricultural commodities and food and fiber markets has been enhanced. The structure is more productive and efficient.

Road Analysis and Display System

The Forest Service (FS) has developed a Road Analysis and Display System to facilitate collection and display information and describe how to monitor, evaluate, and present this information. Key indicators will provide guidance for: (1) tracking efficiency of expenditures; (2) measuring performance of managers; (3) comparing within and between units; (4) identifying relationships to other resource activities; (5) presenting annual program proposals; (6) monitoring road management objectives; and (7) prioritizing project and program allocations.

The FS will implement this system in FY 1988. FS field units used this system to report accomplishments for FY 1987. Overall results show gross unit costs of the road program have been reduced from $43,200 per mile in FY 1986 to $38,900 per mile in FY 1987—a 9.9 percent reduction.

When this system is fully implemented, it should produce, at a minimum, a 1 to 2 percent improvement in the cost effectiveness of the overall roads program over the next 5 years. Based on FS' FY 1987 program, this means an approximate savings of $2 million per year.

The Challenge Grant Program

Congress authorized $1.5 million in FY 1987 to continue the fish and wildlife Challenge Grant program on National Forest lands. All Forest Service (FS) Regions participated and developed cost-sharing partnerships with conservation groups (such as the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and Trout Unlimited), private individuals, and public agencies. Approximately 200 cooperators pooled their financial and human resources with FS in FY 1987 and contributions from cooperators exceeded $2.6 million, greatly surpassing the $1.5 million appropriated for the program.

Cooperators were involved in a variety of projects through the Challenge Grant program. These included forest wildlife habitat improvement (deer, elk, grouse, turkey, songbirds, etc.), wetlands development, reintroduction of peregrine falcons, nest box construction, road closures (to protect eagle nests and other endangered species), and fish habitat improvements.

The Challenge Grant program, in addition to improving wildlife and fish habitats, is strengthening partnerships with forest users. These partnerships improve understanding of overall FS goals and reduce misunderstandings with users.


UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION
We the People
1787 ★ BICENTENNIAL ★ 1987